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ABSTRACT

Fluctuations in financial and enrollment conditions have caused the faculty at Cerritos College (California) to be periodically subjected to intense pressure and to be held responsible for high student withdrawal rates, alternating with periods of administrative indifference. Concomitantly, college policy on non-punitive student course withdrawal has been either rigid or liberal. This study sought to determine if a defined policy on acceptable retention and withdrawal rates should be instituted, in light of data received from students about their reasons for withdrawing from college. Questionnaires were mailed to 3,866 students who had withdrawn in fall 1974; 965 (25%) were returned. Results indicated that employment necessities, financial problems, and job conflicts were the major determinants of withdrawal. Personal and health problems were also major factors. A great deal of variation in reasons for withdrawal was found, and in many cases the interaction of several factors was responsible. It was also found that 34% of those who had withdrawn re-enrolled the following spring, and that only 10% did not plan on enrolling in the future. No formal policy on student withdrawal was suggested based on the findings, but written guidelines relating to withdrawal were recommended for counseling and instructional staff. (BB)

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THE "DROPOUT": A LOOK INTO THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF A LONG-STANDING IMPLIED POLICY AT CERRITOS COLLEGE

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Introduction

Context of the Problem

There are times when institutions of higher education would be wise to heed Jefferson's dictum that "the government which governs least governs best." Policy decisions which are too constrictive often become overly restrictive, stifling institutional initiative and impairing constituency relationships.

As the Founding Fathers discovered nearly two hundred years ago, a broad middle area of "implied" powers must exist which are neither delegated to nor reserved for any political constituency, and yet necessary for the exercise of these delegated and reserved powers by respective constituencies. Similarly, there are broad areas of "implied" powers necessary to effect policy decision in American institutions of higher education which are neither delegated to nor reserved for any of the major political constituencies within that institution. Basic to Anglo-Saxon political as well as academic life, such customs, traditions and unwritten, "unofficial" assumptions have played dominant roles in shaping administrative objectives. The flexibility that such "unofficial" policies provide is not only desirable, but often essential if an institution is to maneuver within guidelines and mandates established by the governing board. This study investigated the historical evolution of one such long-standing "implied" policy at Cerritos College, withdrawals, and the responsibilities assigned to both faculty and students in influencing them.

Statement of the Problem

At present there is no defined policy on acceptable withdrawal rate standards for faculty at Cerritos. Withdrawal and retention rates have

long undergone cyclical interpretations, depending upon administrative philosophy, enrollment trends, or budgetary constraints. The faculty have been subjected to either intensive pressure or laissez faire indifference by administrators depending upon existing policy inclinations.

The general goal of this study was to determine if the college's "unofficial" policy on withdrawals should be altered in light of data received from students relative to their reasons for withdrawing.

Specific purposes of this study were to investigate: (1) whether there was systematic interaction of college constituencies in determining what the withdrawal policy should be; (2) what the influences of each promotional system (administrative, faculty, and students) was in modifying and molding policy directions; (3) what significance should be attributed to reasons given by the students for withdrawing; (4) how far the college should go in reacting to these student explanations; (5) if more administrative leadership was necessary in directing and determining the withdrawal policy; (6) the extent to which external non college influences (employer requests, part-time work demands, health problems) have influenced Cerritos students' explanations for withdrawing; (7) whether student follow-up questionnaires and explanations given for withdrawing reflect general dissatisfaction with the instructional process or their performance; and (8) what further research might be recommended to assess the impact of withdrawals upon withdrawal policy.

Background of the Problem

Administrative concern with withdrawal and retention rates goes back to the inception of the college. Although the concerns appear similar during the phases and time spans discussed below, they are distinguished by subtle internal and external considerations.

During the formative period of Cerritos College spanning the years from 1957 to the Fall of 1965, the mood of the administration reflected that of the community, namely one of boundless optimism and confidence in future expansion. The withdrawal policy was defined for student purposes, rigidly prescribing the weeks during which the student could institute a legal "drop", and providing punitive "WF" grades for those who violated it and did not legally withdraw.

Cerritos College reached its initial hiring peak during the Fall of 1965. It soon became evident that the college had potentially overhired in certain divisional areas, especially with the completion of Rio Hondo College in Whittier and the proposal to open Cypress College in Cypress. By 1966, administrative concern was expressed to the faculty in two ways. Some non-tenured probationary staff were released, while the rest of the non-tenured faculty were subjected to rather intensive pressure during annual evaluation by the Vice President of Instruction when their withdrawal rates exceeded thirty to thirty-five percent.

When enrollment stability returned in 1968, such insinuations and pressures declined. In 1969, a noticeable increase in students indicating academic conflicts with part time jobs was observed. Subsequently, the withdrawal policy was changed to permit student withdrawals until the end of the semester. In 1970-71, during the initial thrust of instructor "accountability", the Office of Instruction through middle management administrators (division chairmen) again strongly equated teaching competence with a lower withdrawal rate. Greater attention paid to student withdrawal explanations and an expanding extended day program made direct equation of withdrawal rates and teaching competence difficult.

With the hiring of a new administrative team in 1972, coupled with

an increasing undistributed general reserve fund and ten percent enrollment increases, administrative sanctions concerning withdrawals and withdrawal rates reached a nadir. Conscious of a need to serve the community, outreach programs both in the graded and community services programs were increased, and students were now permitted to withdraw up to the last day of instruction without fear of a punitive grade.

By the start of fiscal year 1975-76, it became clear that disquieting financial problems loomed on the horizon. Both summer sessions were lumped together and joined to the Fall Semester for calculation of state ADA monies. These monies were themselves "capped" at five percent growth for 1975-76, while the college's enrollment increased eighteen percent, resulting in a drain on the undistributed general reserve fund of nearly one and a half million dollars. State funds with dollar matching grants for construction declined, and some federal funds for capital outlay instructional equipment were refused. In short, financial contingencies now began to dictate restricting enrollment, new programs, and placing more classes on reserve ("hold") status. The college's philosophy on withdrawal now faces a crisis in identity and direction. The faculty generally favors making the withdrawal procedures more rigid and less flexible. The administration wants to pursue follow-up studies on withdrawals and graduates at a time when it may be to the college's financial interest to encourage non-motivated students to withdraw.

Significance of the Problem

Although financial imperatives now overshadow all other considerations, the lack of defined guidelines on withdrawals and the uncertainty as to the reasons for an increasing withdrawal rate should not be completely ignored. Sooner or later unresolved questions concerning withdrawals will

have to be answered. Should the college, as was traditionally done, lay the blame on the instructor or curriculum? Do changing student needs not related to the academic community really determine withdrawal trends? Should existing student withdrawal procedures be less liberal and more structured which would influence both standards and grades? Should Cerritos have a written withdrawal policy in light of constantly changing educational expectations? If we continue not to have one, should the college assume that there is a definable, acceptable retention rate? In short, should the college encourage an "officially" designated or "unofficially" assumed policy?

As the college matures and approaches its twentieth anniversary, and as enrollment and expected funding sources no longer increase commensurate with needed support for all instructional programs, cost-conscious economizing must be started. Withdrawal follow-up surveys have been envisioned to determine the reasons students have given for withdrawal, while other surveys of vocational and academic disciplines have been planned to determine program effectiveness and usefulness in either employment or academic undertakings. The percentage of and reasons for withdrawals are important considerations in assessing Cerritos' "accountability" to both the community and students in instructional and financial terms. The college must face this situation squarely, and consciously decide whether to continue the "unofficial" policy on withdrawals, or formulate "official" policy if that is deemed necessary.

Literature Review

Considerable published research has been accumulated since the Cohen and Brawer revelation in 1970 that most research concerning community college persistence has remained in local college files. The increasing

preoccupation with analyzing and investigating community college persistence and withdrawal rates has not resulted in a clarified picture of why students withdraw nation-wide. Sources not only differ as to the reasons for withdrawals, but disagree as to whether the nonpersister can even be identified. Recommendations for curtailing an increasingly high withdrawal rate are as varied as the colleges studied.

Still, progress has been made locally, regionally, and nationally in identifying potential dropouts, in predicting possible rates of persistence and withdrawal, and in offering plausible alternatives to a "do-nothing" administrative policy.

Perhaps the first step in studying withdrawals at the community college level is to question whether college persistence has a value of its own (Cohen and Brawer, 1970; California State Co-ordinating Council, 1972; Jones, 1969). As Jones (1969) maintained, we need to redefine what is meant by success in college, and then decide if all persistence is good, all attrition bad. The California State Co-ordinating Council study (1972) has found that for some students "stopping-out" is desirable. Within California, the trend is clearly to "stop-in" and "stop-out" with emphasis placed on lifetime education.

Brawer (1973) went even further than in her earlier study with Cohen (1970) when she questioned whether persistence in a traditional college curriculum should have a value in itself. Viewing students as "inputs" and "outputs" was offensive to her, for it implied that students should not bring to the institution their own expectations, or be permitted to "spin off" whenever they desired for whatever the reason. As Cohen and Brawer (1970) warned, "The school experience as an end in itself <u>is</u> the problem in conceptualizing attrition studies (p. 53)."

A Bronx Community College withdrawal study (1975) completed two years ago stated that for any given entering freshmen class from 1970 to 1974, three-fourths returned for a second semester, two-thirds for a third, and only one-half for the fourth and final semester. Even more dramatically, Moore (1974) claimed that from thirty to seventy percent of all community college students nationally become attrition statistics.

Astin's (1972) national study on dropouts emphasized that college persistence was higher than most previous studies had indicated. He related that only one-third of all two-year college students failed to return, and that withdrawal rates were higher for two-year than for four-year college students.

If any sense is to be made out of such divergent statistical data, one must recognize an increasing national phenomenon that the average community college student is older than the average lower division four-year college student; has been out of high school longer; and more often works twenty to thirty hours a week if employed. The nonpersister at the two-year level works considerably more than his four-year counterpart; often has job related curriculum needs; and obvious family obligations (Mahon, 1974). In general, persisters are often distinguished from nonpersisters by whether they are positively encouraged by outside influences to continue (Weigel, 1969). Psychological personality studies have been undertaken, but the results are far from conclusive. Retention is apparently higher in small schools where there is smaller class size and closer student-faculty contacts (Blai, 1972).

Disadvantaged (economically and educationally) and minority students have come under close scrutiny in many attrition studies during the past five years. Astin (1972) implied that being black at a two-year college

was a liability; while Kester (1970) identified the low ability black male with low educational goals, little parental encouragement, few personal aspirations and a low sense of college significance as the most likely to drop. Others have indicated that such criteria, if applicable, would serve to identify any student with similar disadvantages as a potential dropout.

Basic disagreements as to the predictability of survey findings in determining persistence and nonpersistence abound. Greenburg (1972) claimed sixty-five percent prediction accuracy in determining dropouts, MacMillan and Kester (1971) an eighty-five percent success rate in identifying dropouts in the Norcal studies. Astin (1972) cautioned that because of the small multiple correlation coefficients associated with most studies, and the large number of independent variables, no accuracy could be attributed to any study which predicted which types of students would drop.

Reliable predictors, nevertheless, do exist in identifying potential dropouts. A potential dropout comes from all levels of abilities and from all types of backgrounds, (Los Angeles Unified District, 1974; Jones and Dennison, 1972).

The Los Angeles District study (1974) identified the potential dropout as one who read poorly, had a high rate of absenteeism, was more economically deprived, was older than classmates, had lost interest in school, and received poor marks.

Other studies categorized the discontinuing student as typically married, lacking military service, working twenty to forty hours a week, having intentions to transfer, having parents with high school educations (often in a profession), possessing immediate social needs, and succumbing to the outside world's influences and promises (Hughes, 1967; Turner, 1970).

In addition, Aiken (1968) related that the dropout was older, planned to continue work while going to college, and was very much like the persister in terms of parental educational levels and vocational goals.

An in-depth Orange Coast College (1974) questionnaire on withdrawals both substantiated and disputed the above mentioned reference predictors. It found that most students dropped courses early; that instructors were uncertain as to why students quit; that work and class schedule changes necessitated drops more than for other causes; that most nonpersisters don't consult with faculty or counselors prior to dropping; that working didn't add to the students' proposensity to drop; that there was significant correlation between family income, student income and persistence; and that evening division students dropped at a lower rate than day class students (Brightman, 1974). The Grossmont study also affirmed that day students dropped more frequently (Hughes, 1967).

Whether the dropout is more typically a full-time or part-time student, male or female has also been debated in the literature on withdrawals.

Mahon (1974) claimed in his study that fifty-seven percent were part-timers, with most of these students coming for personal enrichment reasons. Alfred (1972) agreed that part-timers withdrew more consistently, while MacDougall (1974) found that part-timers withdrew five times faster than full-timers. Behrendt (1974) more cautiously assumed that attrition remained more constant for part-time students, although the comparative percentages tended to level off after the first two semesters.

West and Lee (1974), on the other hand, found that at Santa Ana College with its larger day enrollment full-time students withdrew more than part-time students.

Sex differentiations are even more confusing in assessing withdrawal

tendencies. The Los Angeles District study (1974) denied that it was a predictable factor, while Selo (1974) definitely related that women have a higher tendency not to return, especially in the eighteen to twenty-five year old age range. Alfred (1972) discovered that women persevered more than men in not dropping individual classes prior to withdrawal.

Definite psychodynamic interrelationships have been uncovered between the individual student and his environment, external as well as institutional. A persister can better endure ambiguity, delay gratification, show adaptive flexibility, better relate to self and society, evince good internal motivation, and exhibit a clear sense of personal identity (Brawer, 1973). The nonpersister finds it difficult to have a social identity, to cope with the college environment, or to seek help in solving institutional problems (Bucklin, 1970). The nonpersister often does not develop aptitudes or interests, or formulate goals and objectives (Jones, 1969).

Determinants of persistence, the absence of which result in attrition, are generally grouped into broad categories such as scholastic aptitude, financial and employment needs, dissatisfaction with instruction, and personal (including health) problems. Most attrition or withdrawal studies do allude to these categories, although Aiken (1968) discovered in his study that such traditional explanations don't always exist.

Turner (1970) admirably summed up the interrelationship of these determinants when he wrote, "Experts agree that attrition is normally due to a cluster of reasons springing from personal characteristics, a match between student and institution, environmental factors and outside forces (p. 5)."

Astin (1971) found high school grades were the most important predictor of persistence for community college students, although less so than for

four-year college students. Ammons (1971) agreed with Astin's conclusion, but also felt the first semester grade point average (g.p.a.) was equally effective in predicting persistence chances.

One study mentioned that eighty-three percent of students withdrawing to seek employment had less than a 2.00 g.p.a., while ninety-one percent of those transferring had higher than a "C" average (Grieve, 1970). Early or late registrants have long been thought to bring different motivations and aptitudes to the classroom. A Mount San Antonio College study uncovered no correlation between g.p.a. and retention based on when a student enrolled (Ragan, 1973).

Poor grades, the absence of adequate academic preparation, and general educational limitations of students were held to be primary causes for withdrawing by a few writers (Blai, 1972; Jones and Dennison, 1972; White, 1971). Although Selo (1974) concurred, he stressed more strongly than the others that the least important reason for withdrawing would be the lack of opportunity to get a course or program (3.6%), or the failure of the college to provide courses for matriculation (1%).

One justification often cited by students for withdrawing which related indirectly to student academic proficiency and institutional curriculums was the selection of another college which offered more of what they were interested in (Snyder and Blocker, 1970; Weigel, 1969).

Financial contingencies and the need to seek employment are often cited by students as major factors in their decision to drop.

As Astin (1972) discovered, nearly every measure relating to financing entered into an analysis on withdrawals. He found that all college students will persist more readily if financed by their parents, by scholarships, by personal savings, or by the G.I. Bill.

Many studies have presumed that financial reasons were the major causes for withdrawals, and certainly among the most frequently listed by students (Jones and Dennison, 1972; MacDougall, 1974; Morrison and Ferrante, 1973; Rowell, 1974; White, 1971).

Closely akin to financial contingencies would be employment necessities and basic job conflicts as determinants of student withdrawal. Some studies confirmed that need to seek employment and work interference were the primary motives behind student withdrawals (Behrendt, 1974; Brawer, 1973; Gell, 1974; Selo, 1974).

A number of other sources reaffirmed that employment needs and job conflicts were among the most often cited reasons for dropping (Bromley, 1973; Mahon, 1974; Martin, 1974: Roesler, 1971; Snyder and Blocker, 1970; Terry, 1973). Roesler (1971) found in his study that need for employment constituted the second most significant reason mentioned for withdrawing, with thirty-seven percent leaving to find employment. In addition, forty-six percent dropped because they claimed the college provided them with no marketable skills. Mahon (1974), on the other hand, intimated that only eleven percent listed the need to work as a reason for nonpersistence.

Dissatisfaction with a college's curriculum proved to be a rather minor determinant for student attrition in the studies. White (1971) tended to give it coequal emphasis with seven other factors, while Selo (1974) insisted that institutional and curricular deficiencies seemed to be the least important reasons given for nonpersistence (3.6%).

The variability of persistence among both instructors and curriculums proved to be an interesting by-product of two studies. Sewell (1972) was one of the stronger advocates of a generally held assumption that instructors' teaching styles are proportionally correlated to retention or withdrawal.

Astin (1972) pointed out that persistence rates differed according to given curriculums. History and political science majors evinced greater persistence than business or nursing majors, with prospective teachers showing higher persistence than any other major.

Among the most numerous explanations given by students for withdrawing are a series of related personal problems, including emotional motivation, health, and family difficulties.

Cohen and Brawer (1970) stressed the importance of the family environment and encouragement in influencing student persistence. Brawer (1973) added positive reinforcement by peers as a conducive incentive in attaining college persistence.

Miller (1974) related that his findings confirmed most students dropped for personal reasons, while Roesler (1971) claimed family and personal problems led in the frequency of responses as withdrawal determinants.

Both Martin (1974) and Terry (1973) affirmed that marriage and family conflicts, as well as the lack of motivation were significant causes of attrition in their nondifferentiated conclusions.

A differing range of intellectual interests and motivations which are responsible for different personality needs culminating in definite propensities toward withdrawal were found to be crucial in the studies of Kievit (1970), Rowell (1974), and White (1971).

Lack of motivation, unrealistic expectations and a basic lack of emotional stability were stressed as basic considerations in determining attrition by Blai (1972), Morrison and Ferrante (1973), and Rowell (1974).

One other category of personal reasons for noncontinuance emerged from the literature. As Mahon (1974) found, most of the students who withdrew felt they had already completed their objectives, and were there-

fore "completers" (22%). Two sources indicated that significant proportions of nonreturning students dropped because their personal goals had been completed, blaming themselves more than the institution if their realized goals did not match their anticipated ones (Davis, 1970; Lightfoot, 1974).

Prior to the ending of the draft, withdrawals to enter the armed forces accounted for a predictable percentage of withdrawals among college males (Snyder and Blocker, 1970).

Lastly, boredom and frustration must be perceived to be two critical but mostly indiscernable reasons behind student attrition. Astin's (1972) U.C.L.A. study surprisingly discovered that thirty-two percent of nonpersisters did so out of boredom. Weigel (1969) also concluded that a large percentage of withdrawals were due to the feeling students had that they were "not getting anywhere."

Unfortunately, there has not been a great deal written about the need to administratively formulate an institutional withdrawal policy. What does exist in the literature stresses drop dates or the grading policy associated with withdrawals. In one sense, this absence of policy or the lack of published material transcending the limits of each institution has resulted in a philosophic paucity of detail which has parochialized each college's experience. Flannery (1973) spoke directly to this problem when he counseled that attrition is interwoven into the entire instructional philosophy of each institution.

In a related way, Astin (1972) reminded his readers that, "The dropout rates of institutions will vary simply by virtue of differences in their admission policies (p. 29)." An ad hoc committee at Riverside City College (California, 1967) recommended twelve years ago that the college should consider adopting an "official" policy position on withdrawals and the

grades assigned to withdrawals. Every community college in the nation has since debated its withdrawal policies and grading system, and discussed the punitive implications associated with many grading systems (Pasadena City College, 1974).

In line with increasing constituency pressure from minority interest groups, many administrative staffs have commissioned studies to ascertain the effects of current withdrawal policies upon these minority students. Morrison and Ferrante (1973) found, and other sources have confirmed, that inadequate financing, emotional instability, and improper motivation often caused the minority students to withdraw. Although they decried the lack of both institutional policy and support for such students, this stereotyping of minority student instructional problems in terms of existing institutional standards reinforced the warning earlier given by Cohen and Brawer (1970) concerning the transposing of existing standards into a value criterion.

A number of sources made policy recommendations for combating increasing attrition rates. Kester (1971) and MacMillan (1973) indicated that the proportional rate of attrition for treated (administratively assisted) students was less than half that for students who received no institutional help. As the Norcal studies confirmed, colleges need to identify and treat potential dropouts by a more scientific method than merely relying on counselor intuition (Kester and MacMillan, 1971, p. 8). For at least ten years colleges have been encouraged to seek nontraditional student registrants from their own hinterlands by creating special centers and programs for them (Cross, 1967). Quite obviously, current administrative policy must be altered to meet their special needs.

A variety of recommended institutional policy innovations have been

stressed in the topic's literature. Special student curriculum counseling (Ammons, 1971; Rowell, 1974; White, 1971); individualized instruction and testing (MacMillan, 1973; White, 1971); increased college subsistence financing (Jones and Dennison, 1972; Kester, 1971; Rowell, 1974); block program scheduling (Brightman, 1974); instructor in-service orientation (Brightman, 1974; Jones and Dennison, 1972; White, 1971); expansion of the work study program (Jones and Dennison, 1972); career counseling (Jones and Dennison, 1972; Kester, 1971; Rowell, 1974); multiple degrees (Jones, 1969); and independent study (Brightman, 1974) were prominently discussed.

Because administrative planning and scheduling can reduce student propensity to drop, the college should recognize that learning habits once thought unacceptable (dropping) may be in the best interest of some students. As Mahon (1974) concluded, the student should be encouraged to determine for himself how, when and where learning is pursued, as well as what is to be learned.

Definition of Terms

"Dropouts". Students who discontinue attendance in all registered classes during any given semester are classified as "dropouts" in this study.

Instructor Accountability. The college expects each instructor to provide students in every class with a definite set of instructional goals and objectives, as well as to assume responsibility for both the assessment scale and withdrawal rate.

Students as "Inputs" and "Outputs". Some educators view students as receptacles for the transmission of their prescribed information and as reflectors of this information during assessment. Students become educational robots in many cases.

Student "Stop-ins" and "Stop-outs". Administrative encouragement is often given to students to practice open entry, open exit from classes and the college at times different from the prescribed term. Many feel students should be provided with flexible enrollment opportunities to meet their own personal needs.

Punitive Grades. These are usually defined by both administrators and faculty as an earned "F" or a penalty "F" (WF - failure to withdraw) grade. In some quarters the "D" is also considered punitive. A current philosophy is that students should be given transcript credit only for units attempted and successfully passed.

Withdrawal Rate. This percentage figure is calculated by dividing the number of students who dropped a class by the total number who initially enrolled in the class as active students.

Method

Subjects

The subjects (Ss) were students identified as having discontinued attendance in all registered classes (withdrawn) at Cerritos College during the Fall Semester 1974. Sample size for this group was 3866.

Development of the Survey Instrument

A literature search was carried out in an attempt to identify common reasons students had given for withdrawing from college. This search along with a perusal of "old" exit interview questionnaires that were discontinued in 1973, revealed that "to become employed", "financial problems", "poor grades", "lack of interest", and, "personal or health problems" were common reasons. After further discussions with the Vice President of Instruction, Dean of Academic Affairs, and members of the counseling staff the following

postage-paid postcard questionnaire was developed (Figure 1).

Our records show that you attended Cerritos College in the fall, 1974, but withdrew from college. We are sincerely interested in learning why you did not continue to attend and would appreciate your feelings in regard to the possible reasons listed below:

_____ To become employed.
_____ Financial problems.
_____ Poor Grades.
_____ Lack of interest.
_____ Personal or health problems.
_____ Courses not relevant to my goals.
_____ General feeling of not getting anywhere.
_____ Had unrealistic expectations of college life.
OTHER _____

Are you presently enrolled this spring ___ yes; ___ no
Are you considering enrolling in the future ___ yes; ___ no

Fig. 1. Postage-paid postcard questionnaire that was sent to students having withdrawn from Cerritos College during the Fall Semester 1974.

Administration of the Survey

During the Spring Semester 1975 the questionnaires along with letters of transmittal (Appendix A), were mailed to each of the 3866 students identified as having withdrawn from Cerritos College during the Fall 1974. Questionnaires were completed and returned by 965 (25%) of the students surveyed. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey a follow-up of students who did not return a questionnaire was not possible.

Analysis of the Survey

Firstly, statements in the "Other" section of the questionnaire were sorted into common response categories. For instance, any statement in the "Other" section that reflected a "dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment" was placed in that category. Secondly, the results of each questionnaire (the response categories that were checked on each

questionnaire, along with the categorized "Other" responses) were manually transferred to computer tab cards. Using a tab card sorter and card counter, calculations were carried out concerning the number of times a particular response category was checked or mentioned under the "Other" section on the 965 questionnaires (see Table 1).

In addition, the 965 questionnaires were sorted into the various individual response category modes. As a result of this sorting procedure 37 different response category modes were identified. Each of the 965 questionnaires was placed under one of these response category modes, and for each category the "Number of Responses" and "Percent of Total Respondees" were calculated (see Table 2).

Other Procedures

In order to investigate what substantive administrative discussion has occurred concerning withdrawals from 1965 to 1975, the following official college records were consulted: Board of Trustee Minutes, Administrative Council Minutes, and the Minutes of the Division Chairmen's Meeting. In addition, a review of the literature was conducted to determine what recent proposals and trends have been proposed relative to college withdrawal policies.

Results

Table 1 presents a summary of the results in response to the statement, "Our records show that you attended Cerritos College in the fall, 1974, but withdrew from college. We are sincerely interested in learning why you did not continue to attend and would appreciate your feelings in regard to the possible reasons listed below". The reason receiving number one ranking was "Personal or health problems" which was checked by 34% of the respondees. Following in rank order were: "To become employed" (17.2%),

Table 1

Category of Responses, Frequency of Responses, Percent of Total Responses, and Percent of Total Respondees (N=965); In Response to "Our Records Show that You Attended Cerritos College in the Fall, 1974 but Withdrew from College. We are Sincerely Interested in Learning Why You Did Not Continue to Attend and Would Appreciate Your Feelings in Regard to the Possible Reasons Listed Below:"

Category of Responses	Frequency of Responses	Percent of Total Responses	Percent of Total Respondees
Personal or health problems	328	28.8%	34.0%
To become employed	166	14.6%	17.2%
Work interference	158	13.9%	16.4%
Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment	99	8.7%	10.3%
Financial problems	98	8.6%	10.2%
Lack of interest	56	4.9%	5.8%
Attended another school	38	3.3%	3.9%
Courses not relevant to my goals	37	3.2%	3.8%
Moved	28	2.5%	2.9%
General feeling of not getting anywhere	25	2.2%	2.6%
Class not available	23	2.0%	2.4%
Poor grades	20	1.8%	2.1%
Conflict with other activities	17	1.5%	1.8%
Class was too advanced	7	0.6%	0.7%
I did not withdraw	7	0.6%	0.7%
Loss of transportation	7	0.6%	0.7%
Got what I wanted out of course and then dropped	5	0.5%	0.5%

Table 1 (continued)

Category of Responses	Frequency of Responses	Percent of Total Responses	Percent of Total Respondees
Class was not advanced enough	4	0.4%	0.4%
Joined service	4	0.4%	0.4%
Class was not on campus as I thought	3	0.3%	0.3%
Had unrealistic expectations of college life	2	0.2%	0.2%
Needed upper division units to get V.A. benefits	1	0.1%	0.1%
Needed a prerequisite	1	0.1%	0.1%
Was out of district	1	0.1%	0.1%
Undecided as to why I left	1	0.1%	0.1%
Total	1136	100.0%	

Table 2

Category of Responses, Number of Responses, and Percent of Total Respondees (N=965); In Response to "Our Records Show that You Attended Cerritos College in the Fall, 1974 but Withdrew from College. We are Sincerely Interested in Learning Why You Did Not Continue to Attend and Would Appreciate Your Feelings in Regard to the Possible Reasons Listed Below:"

Category of Responses	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Respondees
Personal or health problems	286	29.7%
Personal or health problems Financial problems	16	1.7%
Personal or health problems Poor grades	9	0.9%
Personal or health problems Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment	5	0.5%
Personal or health problems Lack of interest	4	0.4%
Work interference	158	16.4%
To become employed	98	10.2%
To become employed Financial problems	32	3.3%
To become employed Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment	25	2.6%
To become employed Financial problems Personal or health problems	8	0.8%
To become employed Financial problems Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment	3	0.3%
Lack of interest	20	2.1%
Lack of interest Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment	32	3.3%
Financial problems	31	3.2%

Table 2 (continued)

Category of Responses	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Respondees
Financial problems Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment	8	0.8%
Attended another school	38	4.0%
Courses not relevant to my goals	26	2.7%
Courses not relevant to my goals Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment	11	1.2%
Moved	28	2.9%
General feeling of not getting anywhere	25	2.6%
Class not available	23	2.4%
Conflict with other activities	17	1.8%
Poor grades	4	0.4%
Poor grades Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment	7	0.7%
Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment	8	0.8%
Class was too advanced	7	0.7%
I did not withdraw	7	0.7%
Loss of transportation	7	0.7%
Got what I wanted out of course and then dropped	5	0.5%
Class was not advanced enough	4	0.4%
Joined service	4	0.4%
Class was not on campus as I thought	3	0.3%
Had unrealistic expectations of college life	2	0.2%
Needed upper division units to get V.A. benefits	1	0.1%
Needed a prerequisite	1	0.1%
Was out of district	1	0.1%
Undecided as to why I left	1	0.1%
Total	965	100.0%

"Work interference" (16.4%), "Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment" (10.3%), "Financial problems" (10.2%), "Lack of interest" (5.8%), "Attended another school" (3.9%), "Courses not relevant to my goals" (3.8%), "Moved" (2.9%), "General feeling of not getting anywhere" (2.6%), "Class not available" (2.4%), "Poor grades" (2.1%), "Conflict with other activities" (1.8%), "Class was too advanced" (0.7%), "I did not withdraw" (0.7%), "Loss of transportation" (0.7%), "Got what I wanted out of course and then dropped" (0.5%), "Class was not advanced enough" (0.4%), "Joined service" (0.4%), "Class was not on campus as I thought" (0.3%), "Had unrealistic expectations of college life" (0.2%), "Needed upper division units to get V. A. benefits" (0.1%), "Needed a prerequisite" (0.1%), "Was out of district" (0.1%), and, "Undecided as to why I left" (0.1%).

Table 2 summarizes the results of sorting the 965 questionnaires into the 37 different individual response category modes that were identified. The reason checked by the largest percentage of the 965 respondees (29.7%) was "Personal or health problems". In addition 0.9% of the respondees checked "Personal or health problems" and "Poor grades"; 0.5% "Personal or health problems" and "Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment"; 0.4% "Personal or health problems" and "Lack of interest".

"Work interference", the second ranked reason for withdrawing, was cited by 158 or 16.4% of the respondees.

The third ranked reason "To become employed" was cited by 98 or 10.2% of the 965 respondees. In addition 3.3% of the respondees checked "To become employed" and "Financial problems"; 2.6% "To become employed" and "Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment"; 0.8% "To become employed", "Financial problems" and "Personal or health problems"; 0.3% "To

become employed", "Financial problems" and "Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment".

"Lack of interest" was checked by 2.1% of the respondees. In addition, "Lack of interest" and "Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment" was cited by 3.3% of the respondees.

"Financial problems" was given as the reason for withdrawing by 3.2% of the respondees; an additional 0.8% checked "Financial problems" and "Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment".

Four percent (4.0%) of the respondees cited "Attended another school" as their reason for withdrawing.

"Courses not relevant to my goals" was checked by 2.7% of the respondees; 1.2% checked "Courses not relevant to my goals" and "Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment".

Other reasons for withdrawing were: "Moved" (2.9%), "General feeling of not getting anywhere" (2.6%), "Class not available" (2.4%), "Conflict with other activities" (1.8%), "Poor grades" (0.4%), "Poor grades" and "Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment" (0.7%), "Dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college environment" (0.8%), "Class was too advanced" (0.7%), "I did not withdraw" (0.7%), "Loss of transportation" (0.7%), "Got what I wanted out of course and then dropped" (0.5%), "Class was not advanced enough" (0.4%), "Joined service" (0.4%), "Class was not on campus as I thought" (0.3%), "Had unrealistic expectations of college life" (0.2%), "Needed upper division units to get V.A. benefits" (0.1%), "Needed a prerequisite" (0.1%), "Was out of district" (0.1%), and, "Undecided as to why I left" (0.1%).

In response to the question, "Are you presently enrolled this spring?", it was found that 327 (33.9%) stated "Yes", 495 (51.5%) "No", and 141

(14.6%) "No answer". Concerning the question, "Are you considering enrolling in the future?", 669 (69.3%) answered "Yes", 98 (10.2%) "No", and 198 (20.5%) "No answer".

Discussion

It was noted earlier in this study that due to the anonymous nature of the survey a follow-up of students who did not return a questionnaire was not possible, and therefore, was not carried out. The results of this study are based upon the responses of the 965 students who completed and returned the questionnaire. One delimiting question must be asked, "If a follow-up of those who did not return a questionnaire had been carried out, would the results have changed?" Because they possibly might have, caution should be exercised in generalizing the results of this study to the total population of withdrawn students as compared with the population of withdrawn students who, for whatever reason, took the time to complete and return this follow-up questionnaire.

The results indicate that employment necessities, financial problems, and basic job conflicts are the major determinants of student withdrawal. For instance, "To become employed", "Financial problems", and "Work interference" were cited as reasons for withdrawing by 44% of the total respondees. These findings are similar to conclusions reached by Astin (1972), Behrendt (1974), Brawer (1973), Bromley (1973), Gell (1974), Jones and Dennison (1972), Mac Dougall (1974), Mahon (1974), Martin (1974), Morrison and Ferrante (1973), Roesler (1971), Rowell (1974), Snyder and Blocker (1970), Terry (1973) and White (1971).

"Personal or health problems" was also found to be another major reason for student withdrawal. Of the 965 students who returned the

questionnaire, 328 (34%) cited "Personal or health problems" as their reason for dropping. This finding agrees with conclusions reached by Cohen and Brawer (1970), Martin (1974), Miller (1974), Roesler (1971), and Terry (1973).

It was observed that many of the respondees who checked "Personal or health problems" specifically designated that their reason for withdrawing was due to ill health. Thus, it is recommended that future questionnaires should be structured in such a way that respondees can easily distinguish between the categories of ill health and personal problems.

The results also indicated that for approximately 22% of the respondees the reasons for withdrawal show a great deal of variation ("Lack of interest", "Attended another school", "Courses not relevant to my goals", "Moved", "Loss of transportation", "Needed a prerequisite", etc.).

It was also observed that for approximately 17% of those who withdrew there were multiple reasons for withdrawal. Thus for some of the students who drop-out the reason for withdrawing is a function of a variety of interacting variables. This finding should remind educators that you can't over-simplify or generalize too much concerning student reasons for withdrawing; for some it is a complex array of reasons that compete with the chances for continuing college education.

It was found that 327 (34%) of those who had withdrawn in the Fall were subsequently enrolled the following Spring semester. In addition, only 10% stated that they did not plan on enrolling in the future. These results lead one to conclude that the "Dropout" is really temporarily "stopping-out" and will be "stopping-in" again in the near future.

Cerritos administrators and faculty have gradually come to the realization that success and persistence in college must be redefined in light of changing student needs and objectives (Jones, 1969). The college has recently made strides toward creating an open-door institution which encourages "stopping-in" and "stopping-out" (California State Co-ordinating Council, 1972).

It was determined that there was no systematic interaction of college constituencies in determining withdrawal policy at Cerritos. These promotional constituencies (administrative, faculty and students) preferred to retain the present unstructured and largely unwritten policy on withdrawals. Board of Trustee records, minutes from the Administrative Council and division chairmen meetings, and faculty handbook directives all emphasized both student withdrawal dates and grading policies. No written policy defined acceptable "retention" rates, institutional expectations, or faculty responsibilities concerning withdrawals.

The results of this study suggest that the college must reassess its policy and propensity to provide only limited direction concerning withdrawal trends. If non-instructional causes (finances, personal problems and health) continue to dominate the responses cited by students for withdrawing, the administration's obligation to provide both direction and information to all elements of the certificated staff will have been increased. The college's certificated staff, both counseling and instructional, must be better oriented to understand reasons students give for withdrawing. Many faculty continue to be offended when potentially good students "drop", and many continue to assume that they have failed the student when he withdraws. Students would, in turn, prefer to have more

faculty awareness of the reasons why they must work, or appreciate the non-academic pressures they must contend with in attending college. Since most community college faculty have not experienced comparable academic and non-academic situations, some written guidelines or orientations concerning withdrawal trends would seem indicated.

Since the majority of Cerritos students could be defined as non-traditional (part-time and older), other studies which have emphasized traditional lower-division academic values proved to have limited value (Hughes, 1967; Los Angeles district study, 1974; Turner, 1970). To simply state that "drop-outs" are older, married, or plan to continue working (Aiken, 1968) would stereotype the majority of Cerritos students as potential "drop-outs." Since nontraditional students do matriculate at a different pace and in a different manner than traditional lower-division students, persistence has been found to be equally high in classes with many nontraditional students.

Identifying nonpersisters is always difficult at an open-door community college. As more colleges come to reflect their community's varied interests, generalizations as to what distinguishes persisters from nonpersisters must be carefully scrutinized. Weigel's (1969) assumptions that outside psychological encouragements were important determinants of persistence may once have been valid, but with a majority of Cerritos "drop-outs" now citing non-academic reasons for withdrawal, his criterion should be modified.

Does persistence have a value of its own? At Cerritos the answer would have to be "yes". Although, as Cohen and Brawer (1970) warned, this could obscure the opportunity to re-conceptualize attrition studies,

persistence among all of the college's student populations is still a desired objective. Even though Moore (1974) discovered high national "drop-out" rates, Astin (1972) did find that persistence among all students was often higher than anticipated. Although withdrawal rates have increased recently, at Cerritos as well as nationally, they have not skyrocketed as rapidly as some administrators and many faculty have imagined relative to the persisting population. More students do "drop", but there are more students to begin with.

Institutional Recommendations

Based upon the findings of Kester (1971), Kester and MacMillan (1971), and MacMillan (1973), administratively assisted students evinced considerably higher "retention" than students who received no institutional counseling and guidance.

For this reason, this study encourages Cerritos College administrators to draft a recommended written policy position on withdrawals after discussion with faculty and students.

Special student career and curriculum counseling (Ammons 1971; Rowell, 1974; White, 1971) has become an absolute necessity if the college is to lower the withdrawal rate, or even understand what is behind it. Instead of predominantly voluntary student counseling, the college's counseling and departmental-divisional faculties are encouraged to jointly participate in CareerCenter "rap" sessions which would deal with career objectives, curriculum needs, and psychodynamic inter-relationships as they relate to both on and off-campus student acitivities.

This study recommends that the Financial Assistance Office continue

its present commendable efforts toward uncovering more revenue sources for financially disadvantaged students. In addition, this office must work in closer conjunction with counseling and divisional faculties who are concerned with preparing the student for future occupational or transfer goals. The entire college staff must be encouraged to understand the district's employment opportunities and economic problems as they relate to Cerritos students. Since an increase in college subsistance financing (Jones and Dennison, 1972; Kester, 1971; Rowell, 1974) appears unlikely at this time, an expansion of the work-study program is encouraged to help the many students who need assistance in finding part-time jobs (Jones and Dennison, 1972).

The college is requested to continue class scheduling innovations such as block programming or independent study (Brightman, 1974). In addition to expanding "open-entry" - "open-exit" enrollment and modular class credit (partial credit for partial completion), it is suggested that the college permit official class schedule changes at any time between consenting instructors when student job conflicts require it.

Finally, impressions derived from this study would indicate an overwhelming necessity for the college to openly analyze and discuss the withdrawal rate and causal determinants for it. Unless there is some dialog between the respective college staffs (administrative, counseling and faculty), needed in-service orientation (Brightman, 1974; Jones and Dennison, 1972; White, 1971) will never be realized. If the college is to better meet the needs of traditional and nontraditional students alike, expectations and objectives must be shared by all college clienteles and staffs through both informal discussions and formal meetings.

This study does not propose a formal, written board policy on withdrawal at this time. It does recommend unofficial, written handbook guidelines for counseling and instructional faculties which would offer realistic and workable data and suggestions for dealing with withdrawals on this campus.

Thereafter, if students continue to withdraw at the same rate and for the same reasons, the college would then be justified in following Mahon's (1974) suggestion that "dropping" may be in the best interest of some students after they have had an opportunity to determine for themselves what, when and where learning is to take place.

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APPENDIX

Cerritos College

11110 East Alondra Boulevard, Norwalk, California 90650 · (213) 860-2451
Serving Artesia, Bellflower, Cerritos, Downey, Hawaiian Gardens, Lakewood, La Mirada, Norwalk

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February 11, 1975

Dear Former Student:

Our records show that you attended Cerritos College in the fall, 1974, but had to withdraw from college. We are sincerely interested in learning why you were not able to continue to attend and would appreciate your feelings in regard to the possible reasons listed on the enclosed questionnaire.

We are particularly desirous of obtaining your response to the items on the questionnaire since we feel that they will contribute significantly toward solving some of the problems students face while attending college.

Please take a few minutes of your time and complete the enclosed questionnaire on the self-addressed, postage-paid postcard.

Sincerely yours,

Gary Schaumburg
Director of Research

GS:als

Enclosure: Postcard

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